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OutdoorSafe with Peter Kummerfeldt

Staying alive in the outdoors during an emergency can take skill, the proper equipment and training. Outdoor help you gain all three, so you have a fighting chance in any urban or wilderness survival situation.

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

Building Fires in the Rain

There's no better time or place to test your fire building skills than in Oregon's Coast Range, in February, in the rain! These were the conditions that eighteen Search and Rescue team members experienced recently. The SAR team-members and I gathered one wet Friday afternoon to brush up their survival skills and to test the effectiveness of their clothing and the equipment they carried. Intuitively I think we understand the difference between building a fire on a hot July day and building one in February when it's bucketing rain, you're cold and wet, your fingers have lost their dexterity and their strength, you need a fire to help protect the victim of an accident and you need it now! But sometimes we need a reminder on just how difficult building a fire can be. Friday afternoon was just such a reminder!



For those of you who have yet to try to find yourself in similar situation here are some of the lessons they re-learned that afternoon:

If it's coming down hard the first thing you must do is erect a rain-fly over the area where you hope to build your fire. Lacking a tarp find some natural protection from the precipitation by

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About Me



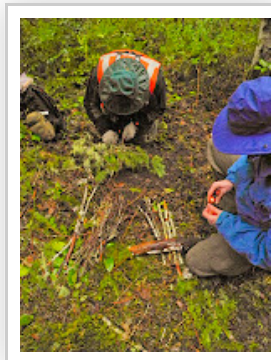
Peter Kummerfeldt

Peter Kummerfeldt has walked the talk in the wilderness survival field for decades. Peter grew up in Kenya, East Africa and came to America in 1965 and joined the U.S. Air Force. He is a graduate of the Air Force Survival Instructor Training School and has served as an instructor at the Basic Survival School, Spokane, Washington, in the Arctic Survival School, Fairbanks, Alaska, and the Jungle Survival School, Republic of the Philippines. For twelve years, Peter was the Survival Training Director at the United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado. He retired from the Air Force in 1995 after 30 years of service. In 1992, concerned with the number of accidents that were occurring in the outdoors annually and the number of tourists traveling overseas who were involved in sometimes life-threatening

selecting a fire site that is under the over-hanging branches of a tree - preferably an evergreen. Regardless of how good your tinder is or how skilled you are at fire building, if it is pouring down your chances of success are not very good.



Under wet conditions you must have good tinder. By my definition "a good tinder" is one that you have brought with you – one that works under all conditions. Good tinder should be easy to ignite under difficult conditions. It should be long burning in wet, windy weather and ideally should also be waterproof. It is very unlikely that you will be able to find such tinder on-site.



Of all of the commercially available products nothing beats a cotton ball saturated with Vaseline (petroleum jelly) for starting a fire under difficult conditions. Having said that, several of the students had trouble using this usually effective fire starting aid. The difficulties they experienced were a direct result of the amount of Vaseline they had used to saturate the cotton ball. More is not

necessarily better! Too much Vaseline saturates the cotton to the point that, when the cotton ball is "fluffed-up," no fine fibers are created. It is these exposed fibers that catch the spark from a [metal match](#) (or other heat source) and are ignited and then, in turn, provide a wick to burn the Vaseline. Coating just the outside of a cotton ball with Vaseline is also not good enough. While this produces a lot of fiber to light, the limited amount of Vaseline shortens the burn time – there's not enough fuel! A cotton ball with just the outside surface coated in Vaseline is also not waterproof. Liquefying a container of Vaseline by heating it in a microwave and then dunking cotton balls in the melted petroleum jelly is also not a good idea. This procedure supersaturates the cotton again making it difficult to light.

So how much is enough? There's no precise answer to the question but here's how I make mine.

Start with the largest cotton ball you can buy. I like "Johnson & Johnson maxi size." Tease the cotton fiber into the largest thinnest disc you can without tearing into pieces. Coat the fiber

incidents Peter created Outdoorsafe.com He is the author of Surviving a Wilderness Emergency and has addressed over 20,000 people as the featured speaker at numerous seminars, conferences and national conventions.

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9 - 13 January US Customs & Border Protection, St Augustine, FL

6 Feb - Boy Scouts Portland, OR

8 - 12 February Pacific NW Sportsmen's Show Portland, OR

13 Feb Fort Vancouver Scouts, Vancouver, WA

24 Feb -Benton County SAR training, Corvallis, OR

3 March Colorado Division of Wildlife Hunter Ed. Training Montrose, CO

31 Aug - 4 Sept Surviving a Wilderness Emergency/Wilderness Navigation Course, Missoula, MT

Call 719-593-5850 for more information

Training Opportunities

OutdoorSafe Inc/US Forest Service Survival/Navigation Course. Missoula, MT August 31st through September 4, 2012

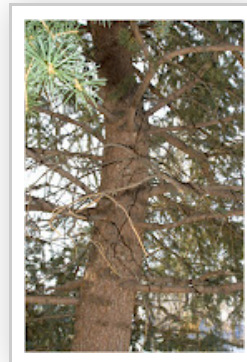
with Vaseline until there is no dry cotton left but without adding so much Vaseline that the fibers collapse into a soggy, gooey mess. This is the part that takes a bit of experience. You have it just right when, after adding the Vaseline, long fibers are created when the cotton ball is pulled into two pieces.



After being stored, don't forget to pull the cotton ball into two pieces once again and then place the compacted lower halves together retaining all of the "feathers" that are created. It is these feathers that will catch the spark and cause the Vaseline to burn.

Here's another tip that comes to mind regarding the storage and use of the cotton ball-Vaseline mixture. If you work or recreate outdoors in cold weather keep your cotton ball container warm or warm it before you try to remove the fire starter. A frozen, saturated cotton ball can be very difficult to remove from the container and will also be difficult to light.

Locating fuel for the first stages of your fire is also a very important step. Even in wet weather, it is usually possible to find thin, dry twigs (match stick thick up to pencil thickness) under the overhanging branches of larger trees – especially evergreen trees such as fir and spruce. When small, dry fuel is not available collect what you can and then scrape off every scrap of wet bark and moss from the wood. With larger dimension wood split it into thinner and thinner pieces until you end up with a pile of wood splinters that are long and thin.



And finally, your fire building success will depend on not only the reliability of your heat source, the quality of your tinder, the process you use to build the fire but also the time you take to get everything ready before you apply the heat source to your tinder. If you take short-cuts you are doomed to fail!

For more information on building a fire check out the DVD "[Skills of a Survivor](#)" and the downloadable eBook "[A Better Way to Build a Fire](#)"

Posted by [Peter Kummerfeldt](#) at 11:02 AM

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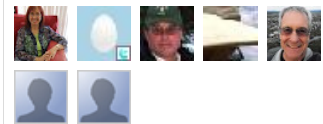
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